

taste buds

chef Larry
JanesDon't fuss
over the
appetizers

After this season's holiday get-togethers, if I ever see another cocktail meatball or weenie, it will be all too soon.

Granted, not all holiday hosts/hostesses have the culinary ability of Jimmy Schmidt, but when will people begin to realize that radishes do not lend themselves to the vegetable dip platter?

THERE is little doubt that at this time of year, we barely have time to keep the toast crumbs from adulterating the butter dish. When it comes time to prepare an innovative pot-luck-something-or-other for a holiday party, some of us resort to the easiness of opening a can of crabmeat and spreading it over a pound of cream cheese smothered in cocktail sauce.

If you find yourself doing just that, then the new wave of restaurant supply shops opening all over town will surely be appreciated this season.

For the uninitiated, places like Leone Cash and Carry in Sterling Heights and Livonia offer a wide assortment of "heat and eat" appetizers, canapés and desserts that simply require you to open a package, arrange on a baking sheet, and heat for 10 minutes at 375 degrees. Period. No muss, no fuss and your nails will dry in time for the party.

GORDON FOOD Services in Canton and Lombardi Foods in the Utica-Rochester area are big helps to the local party scene and like Leone, also stock paper and plastic supplies for the almost one-stop holiday party. Another excellent party source for both hors d'oeuvres and appetizers are the local "warehouse-type" food shopping clubs springing up all over the metro area.

A recent visit found their freezers full of a wide assortment of tiny puff pastries brimming with the likes of purees, vegetables, cheeses and meats.

By the way, convenience does have its costs and you can expect to pay for some machine plopping out mini-quiches in a big way, but when you realize that most low-budget caterers shop this way, you can save even more by unwrapping, plating and heating yourself.

AH, BUT that simply takes us to the realms of stuffed puff pastries and better tasting meatballs, right? Who can the discerning party goer or giver call for exemplary party foods? Someone with a little talent and flair for presentation can certainly benefit from the local "super" grocery stores pantry and deli departments.

I'm not talking ground baloney here folks, the super Kroger store on Middlebelt Road in Garden City has a stunning array of dips and prepared foods as does the new "Super Shopping Center Market" that recently opened at Fourteen Mile and Haggerty. This place is the yuppie food shoppers dream. If you need it, they have it.

Another hot and trendy source for good holiday foods are the upscale deli's and "Gourmet-to-go" shops. I stopped in at Eddie Joma's Merchant of Vino for a jug of wine and left with two grocery bags filled with pasta salads, Waldorf's and a hummus that you would simply die for.

LAST, BUT certainly not least, for fancy pastries and desserts, have you noticed the rash of little fancy bakeries and patisseries springing up all over town? The French Epit in Livonia stocks tortes, cakes and some of the best breads and sweet rolls around town.

So if this holiday season has you all tied up with other holiday chores, remember that there are some outstanding places to shop that can make cooking a whole lot easier!

See recipes inside.

Rock solid ties to homeland

Treasured recipes keep culture alive

By Keely Wygonik
staff writer

SHAKEN BY invasions from the Tatars, Persians, Russians and Turks, and an earthquake that killed more than 100,000, and left 500,000 homeless on Dec. 7, 1988, Armenians have clung tenaciously to their religion, culture and traditions.

U.S. ties to the homeland are strong. One of the earliest settlements in Detroit was in Delray in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The community later branched out to Highland Park, Dearborn and Southfield.

TODAY, ARMENIANS are scattered throughout the metropolitan area, but they stick together. When the earthquake struck, Armenian Americans rallied to quickly dispatch aid.

"We continue to raise funds. They haven't revived completely," said the Rev. Vahan N. Tootikian, pastor of the Armenian Congregational Church in Southfield. "They are coming back, but it is a hard struggle. You can't solve the problem in light of the present economy, it is completely shattered."

"Armenians have always been optimistic, they've seen many hardships, but have always been a people of hope who believe the future will be better," said Tootikian.

Filled with hope over the changes in the Soviet Union, Armenians forge ahead.

It has been their fortune, or misfortune, to be strategically located where east meets west on trade routes bordering Turkey, the Soviet Union and Persia (Iran).

"Food brings Armenians together," said Gary Reizian, owner of Uptown Deli and catering in Farmington Hills. "One way we keep our culture alive is through food," said Judy Mardigian of Plymouth.

Although they grew up in different cities, Reizian in Lathrup Village, Mardigian in Dearborn Heights, as second generation Armenians they have a lot in common.



SHARON LEM/ELUX/staff photographer

Mardigian's father grew up in Delray, her mother in Detroit near Delray. Reizian's father grew up in Delray, his mother in Highland Park. As children they lived with their parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters in an extended family household.

REIZIAN IS married to an Armenian woman, Sue, they have two children, Lauren, 9 and Nicole, 8 and live in West Bloomfield.

Mardigian is also a small business owner. She and her husband, Si Nabra, who is part Lebanese, operate Health Decisions, Inc., a health care consulting firm in Plymouth. They also have two children, Charlie, 3½, and Sandy, 10 months.

Mardigian and Reizian both enjoy cooking, and carrying on recipes

that were passed down generation to generation.

"When Armenians get together we have feasts, food is important," said Reizian. "Our family gets together almost every Sunday," said Mardigian.

Dinner begins with mezza, (appetizers). One of Mardigian's favorite appetizers is basturma, a spicy, cured piece of beef tenderloin that's eaten with pita bread. Other dishes that might be on a mezza table include homemade pickles (tourshou), stuffed grape leaves, braided string cheese, spicy sausage (sujuk), and pastries filled with meat, spinach or cheese (boureks).

Armenian cuisine is similar to Greek and Middle Eastern. While talking about the foods he grew up eating, Reizian named lamb,

eggplant, tomatoes, green beans, taboulee, hummus, brick cheese and lots of different kinds of bread from the thin almost tortilla like Lahvash to the thick oval pita bread.

In addition to the usual deli sandwiches, you'll find roll up sandwiches made with lavash bread, hummus, taboulee, beef and chicken kababs on the menu at Uptown Deli. One of the most popular items is Lahmajoons, meat pies made with ground beef and lamb, tomatoes, onions, green peppers and parsley.

Like many Armenian cooks, Mardigian's mom, the late Louise Solakian Mardigian, made her own yogurt used in soups, on top of meat pies and enjoyed with relish. "You can always count on an Armenian household for a yogurt starter," said Mardigian.

Gary Reizian, owner of Uptown Deli in Farmington Hills, presents freshly made Lahmajoons, an Armenian meat pie made with ground beef and lamb, tomatoes, onions, green peppers, parsley and seasonings.

Coming events

For more information about the Armenian community, and cookbooks, call St. John's Armenian Apostolic Church, 22001 Northwestern Highway, Southfield, 569-3405.

The Armenian Congregational Church, 22010 W. 12 Mile Road, Southfield, is having a Christmas Eve program with a reception following, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 24. Call 352-0880 for information. St. Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, 19320 Ford Road, Dearborn is hosting a luncheon following Christmas services 11 a.m. Sunday, Jan. 6. Call 336-6200 for information.

Meal draws chorus of approval

The expression, "singing for your supper" takes on a new meaning when applied to this week's Winner Dinner Winner, Marily Sampson of Troy.

family
tested
winner
dinner
**Betsy
Brethen**

Six years ago, she had the honor and privilege of singing a solo at a Thanksgiving party where the guest of honor was the Lord Mayor of London, England. Hosted by the Woolnoth Society, an Anglo-American association of bankers, a traditional American buffet dinner followed the service which was held in the guild Church of St. Mary of Woolnoth, located right in the heart of the financial district of London.

It was a thrilling experience for Sampson and her family as they had stepped back in time as the Lord Mayor and his entourage were dressed in colorful, flowing robes and were heralded in the ancient, banner bedecked church by the Queen's own trumpeters.

Sampson's husband, Clint, is a banker for National Bank of Detroit and was transferred to England for four years. They and their young daughter lived in a home owned by the bank that was located in a small close or cul-de-sac in the town of Purley-Surrey, only 15 miles outside of London.

They especially enjoyed getting to know their international neighbors who came from countries all around the world. Two or three times a year, they would have pot-luck dinners, with each family bringing a favorite dish from their native country. It was at one of these parties that Sampson first taste this week's Winner Dinner that was selected by one of her neighbors from Sri Lanka who kindly taught her how to make it.



JIM RIDER/staff photographer

Marilyn Sampson of Troy shares one of her family's favorite Winner Dinners, Curried chicken, rice and Creme Brulee.

Having been back from England since 1988, Sampson has kept up with her music career and continues to give voice lessons as well as to sing professionally with the Michigan Opera Theatre as well as with most of the local symphonies.

Thank you, Marily Sampson, for sharing your delicious recipes, and congratulations on being selected this week's Winner Dinner Winner. Your meal is sure to be met with a

chorus of approval from all who taste it.

As a reminder, in anticipation of the upcoming 100th Winner Dinner column, please call Taste editor Keely Wygonik at 953-2105 to cast your vote for the best Winner Dinner.

To submit recipes to be considered for publication, write: Winner Dinner, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham, MI 48012.

OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC WINNER DINNER

Recipes

CURRIED CHICKEN OR LAMB

Colorful and bursting with flavor, this heart smart dish serves six and can be made ahead and reheated just prior to serving.

- 4 medium onions, sliced
- 2-3 tablespoons oil or 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 pound cubed chicken or lamb
- 2 slices fresh ginger
- 1 teaspoon powdered ginger (Fresh ginger is a gnarled and bumpy root that can be found in the produce section. To use, simply slice off a thin piece or two and add to dish. Wrap and refrigerate the remaining root and it will keep for weeks.)
- 2 fresh tomatoes or 1 can tomatoes, 8 ounce size, chopped
- 1 carton low-fat yogurt, 8 ounce size
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 2 heaping tablespoons mild curry powder

PLUS

- ¼ teaspoon curry powder (optional)
- 2 tablespoons paprika (eliminate this if using chicken)
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped finely
- Juice of half of a lemon or lime
- Pinch of garam masala (a blend of dry-roasted spices that adds a sense of "warmth" to both palate and spirit — available in specialty or Indian food stores)
- Saute onions in oil or broth. When tender, add cubed chicken or lamb and simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Add the ginger (fresh ginger is preferred). Combine some of the warm liquid in the pan to the yogurt and then add the yogurt mixture to the pan. Cook for five minutes. Add the

chopped tomatoes, the salt, the curry and the garlic and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the remaining amount of curry and squeeze half of a lemon or lime over the dish and add a pinch of garam masala. Stir to blend well and serve over rice.

CREME BRULEE

This is a delicious dessert and a refreshing complement to the spiciness of the curried dish. Serves eight.

CREME BRULEE

- 4 egg yolks
- ½ pint whipping cream
- few drops of vanilla
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ pint half and half
- CARAMEL TOPPING
- 4 tablespoons sugar
- 4 tablespoons cold water
- Blend together egg yolks and sugar with a spoon. Pour whipping cream onto the egg mixture and stir in the vanilla. Strain the mixture through a sieve into eight ramekins or a 1½ quart ovenproof baking dish. Stand the dishes in a metal baking pan or dish containing 1 inch of hot water. Bake for 1½ hours or until just firm in a very cool oven — 280 degrees. Refrigerate, covered, to set overnight.

The next day, make the caramel sauce 2-4 hours before serving. Dissolve sugar in water in pan over low heat without boiling. Then, boil rapidly until golden brown and pour quickly over custards, tilting the ramekins to spread it evenly. The caramel will set like glass in seconds. Refrigerate until serving. NOTE: The Creme Brulee can be made in one day, provided enough time is allowed for it to set and chill thoroughly.